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STATEMENT BY CHARLES M. JONES

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A Statement
By Charles M. Jones
On the Occasion of
His Withdrawing from
The Presbyterian Ministry



DELIVERED AT SUMMER MEETING, ORANGE PRESBYTERY,
SYNOD OF NORTH CAROLINA, PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF
THE UNITED STATES, HELD AT NEW HOPE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH, CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA, JULY 6, 1953



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I

Events Leading to Withdrawal

IN APRIL 1952 the Chairman of Orange Presbytery's Council, acting unofficially, asked me to meet with some members of Orange Presbytery. I was not informed of the exact purpose of the meeting then but it soon became apparent that it was to inform me that in their judgment "the welfare of the Church" and my own would be served by my quiet withdrawal from the pastorate in Chapel Hill to accept work in some other Presbyterian Church.

June 13, 1952, Orange Presbytery appointed a Judicial Commission empowered "to investigate thoroughly the total situation in the Presbyterian Church of Chapel Hill and report back to the Presbytery . . ."

This Commission investigated and on November 20, 1952 formulated a paper known as "Report—Judicial Commission of Orange Presbytery." The Commission also took action of which I was informed in a letter dated November 21, 1952, which reads in part as follows:

"The Commission feels that a clean break should be made between yourself and the Church, and that as quickly as possible. This then, is to ask you to indicate your intention to resign this pastorate . . ."

I was informed of this action by mail immediately but was not sent a copy of the Report on which they based their action until after it had been read to the officers of the Church some ten days later.

I answered the Commission that in view of the unanimous support of the officers and the well nigh unanimous support of

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the congregation, I could not resign "for the welfare of the Church" without hypocrisy. I asked them to place their recommendation before a full meeting of Orange Presbytery with the evidence supporting it and said that if that were done I would abide by the decision of the Presbytery.

On January 20, 1953, at a called meeting of Orange Presbytery, the Commission read a report which presented *no* evidence for its action but asked for "authority to continue its work and conclude the matter." Without asking for or hearing evidence the Presbytery granted this authority.

On February 9 I met with the Commission at their request. Again they asked for my voluntary resignation "for the welfare of the Church." Again I called attention to the lack of concreteness in the phrase and the overwhelming support of both officers and congregation in a judgment contrary to theirs. I contended that my resignation at that time, either voluntary or enforced, would be detrimental to the welfare of the Church and asked them to have a conference with the officers of the Church. They refused to do this.

As an inducement to resign I was offered sufficient time to find another pastorate and the privilege of resigning and making the change in the routine way. This they said would "keep my record clean." The refusal of this course of action brought a reminder from the Chairman of the Commission that charges could be brought against me if I did not voluntarily resign.

Upon my insistence on the right to consult the officers of the Church before I gave final answer, the Commission reluctantly gave me five days in which to reply. Consultation with the officers of the Church revealed a unanimous opinion that I should not accede to the request of the Commission. I notified the Commission by letter on February 14 that I could not voluntarily resign the pastorate of the Chapel Hill Church.

The Commission officially removed me from this pastorate by an order given February 17 to take effect March 1. This ordered removal was not for "the welfare of the Church" as their previous requests to me had been phrased, but because "the interests of religion imperatively demand it."

Official notice of my dismissal was slow in coming and I visited the Chairman to get a copy. In our conversation he empha-

sized that there were no censures or charges against me and that I was "in good and regular standing." The same statements were made to a Raleigh News and Observer reporter and appeared in that newspaper.

I accepted the decision of the Commission and engaged in no pastoral or pulpit work in the Church after March 1, 1953.

Members of the Chapel Hill Church appealed my removal to the Synod of North Carolina. A Commission appointed by that body met on May 22, 1953 to consider the appeal. On June 2 this Commission reported to the Synod an order to Orange Presbytery to hold a new hearing immediately. Pending outcome of the hearing, the dissolution of the pastoral relationship was to remain in effect. The Commission suggested that such a hearing would not be necessary if Orange Presbytery and the Chapel Hill Church could reconcile their differences. This the Church and I had expressed a desire to do.

However, Orange Presbytery appealed the decision of the Synod of North Carolina to the General Assembly which upheld the Presbytery's right to dissolve the pastoral relationship on the general charge, "the interests of religion demand it." So the dismissal stands. The General Assembly instructed Orange Presbytery to give me a trial if I desired.

The decision of the Synod of North Carolina, though not wholly just, insofar as it sustained a dissolution order arrived at by a method they condemned as inadequate and unfair, did make the permanency of the order depend on its justification in open trial.

But the decision of the General Assembly to grant the right of trial seems pointless inasmuch as no matter what the outcome of the trial might be, the dissolution order would not be reversed. As one officer of the Church put it: "It is as if a man were executed and then told he could have a trial if he desired."

Following the decision of the General Assembly I conferred with the former officers (who had also been removed from office by the Presbytery's Commission). All present unanimously agreed I should request Presbytery to join me in asking Synod to set up a Commission to hear *all* charges and *all* evidence and judge the merits. If this were refused we agreed the most constructive action for all concerned would be for me to ask Orange Presbytery

to release me from my vows and responsibilities as a minister in the Presbyterian Church of the United States.

Only one officer of the Church (not present at the meeting) and a few ministers and friends have expressed the hope that I would force Presbytery to give me a trial and appeal to the Synod and the General Assembly from the result if such were necessary. I believe a trial in this Presbytery would be productive of little save hard feelings and confusion, so I have decided not to force a trial before Presbytery. I do so for the following reasons:

1. A FULL AND FAIR TRIAL IN THIS PRESBYTERY IS UNLIKELY.

At the April 23 meeting of Orange Presbytery, a representative of the Chapel Hill congregation asked Presbytery to make the evidence on which the Commission had based my removal available to them in order that they might make adequate complaint. The Chairman of the Commission stated that documents containing evidence designated "confidential" would be withdrawn from the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery and the Commission's Report to Presbytery would be withdrawn and some of it removed and changed, if they were pressed to release all the evidence. Presbytery would not make the evidence available.

The fact that Presbytery will make this evidence available in the future does not change the situation. With such fear of bringing this evidence to light it is hopeless to expect a full hearing in this Presbytery.

Not only would a full airing of charges be impossible but a fair hearing on what charges the Commission would be willing to present would be unlikely. Orange Presbytery has already acted as investigator and prosecutor. To add the function of judge and jury to the same group is asking too much of human nature.

A case which has been discussed so fully that emotions have been aroused and opinions formed will in civil justice be transferred to another court which can give objective hearing to the case. A "change of venue" should have been granted in this case.

2. A TRIAL BY PRESBYTERY WOULD PRODUCE NOTHING CONSTRUCTIVE FOR THE CHAPEL HILL CHURCH.

The Chapel Hill Church has been under severe strain through-

out this year but has carried on a full program of activities under the guidance of lay Committees and with the help of Dr. R. J. McMullen. A trial by Orange Presbytery and the subsequent appeals would keep the Church and community stirred up for another year. Furthermore, no matter what the outcome of the trial the result would have no effect in reversing the decision of Orange Presbytery which the Church feels is unjust. It would be better for the Presbyterians of Chapel Hill to be free from the anxiety and tension that would be involved in further and futile litigation in Orange Presbytery.

3. NOTHING CONSTRUCTIVE COULD COME OUT OF A TRIAL BEFORE PRESBYTERY FOR ME.

The entire idea of a trial is and has been distasteful to me and only to be endured as a necessary evil. Heresy trials belong to medieval times and are foreign to the spirit of Christ. I have (as have the officers) expressed several times a desire to meet with the Commission for a frank discussion of our differences and those things it deems weaknesses with a view toward finding common ground, achieving understanding and improvement. Such would bring the Christian spirit of reconciliation to bear in our controversy.

Only if there is confidence and affection between us is it possible to work creatively together. The work and report of Orange Presbytery's Commission has created an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust that even clearance by a trial could not erase. One wants not only, or even mainly, vindication but acceptance, confidence and the affection of those with whom he will labor.

4. THE PRESBYTERY ITSELF AND THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AS A WHOLE WOULD BE DAMAGED BY A TRIAL BEFORE ORANGE PRESBYTERY.

Even though the Presbytery is convinced it has acted fairly and without prejudice, the lack of sensitivity to fairness in this case has been recognized by both the secular and the Church press. It is therefore unlikely that anything save prejudice and bitterness will continue to be expressed in a trial before Orange Presbytery. The almost inevitable exercise of these qualities in a trial will be no more helpful to Orange Presbytery and Presbyterianism as a whole than it would be to me.

The Book of Church Order, Paragraph 263, reads in part as follows:

“A minister of the gospel . . . if he has satisfactory evidence of his inability to serve the Church with acceptance, may report these facts at a stated meeting of the Presbytery. At the next stated meeting, if after full deliberation the Presbytery shall concur with him in judgment, it may divest him of his office without censure.”

The Chapel Hill Presbyteryian Church through unanimous vote of its officers and overwhelming vote of the congregation declared my ministry acceptable and helpful to them. Their devotion to the Church and its work has been both an inspiration and a means of growth to me.

But the stubborn fact remains that I do not serve the Church to the satisfaction of Orange Presbytery. I desire to report my inability to serve the Church with acceptance and to request that Presbytery divest me of office.

In this connection, I want to make the following statement:

II

ANSWER TO THE REPORT OF THE JUDICIAL COMMISSION OF ORANGE PRESBYTERY.

YOUR Commission has recorded judgment on my work as pastor of the Chapel Hill Church in a section of the document entitled: “Report—Judicial Commission of Orange Presbytery,” dated November 30, 1952.

It has steadfastly refused all requests for me or the Church to see the evidence from which it has drawn these conclusions even to the point of threatening to withhold the evidence by not formally presenting it to Presbytery at all if it had to let anyone see it. This I have felt unfair. No man’s work when examined with such criticalness will be lacking in mistakes and failures. There is, however, no failure in my twelve years of ministry in Chapel Hill that need be kept secret.

The lack of thoroughness and fairness in the work of the Commission was protested by one of its members, a lawyer and judge, who refused to cast a vote either for or against my

dismissal. Concerning this refusal to vote he writes:

“. . . This I did without any opinion on the merits of the case, but actually because I could form no such opinion on the merits of the case from what I had heard . . . Our form of Church government guarantees the same rights in these matters as does our American form of government, and I did not feel these rights had been accorded, especially *in the right to confrontation, the right to cross-examine, and the right to be heard fully*. I have argued these matters in the Commission and have dissented from their action . . .” (Italics mine)

When the aforementioned report was read to the officers of the Church by the Commission Chairman he refused to permit discussion of it saying, “The report is not for discussion.” At no time have I been given the opportunity to discuss the Report, comment on it or answer it with the Commission. This is regrettable, not simply because of the unfairness involved, but because it has produced (all unintentionally) a Report with errors, misrepresentations and misunderstandings.

I ask the privilege of clarifying and answering the section of the Report in which the Commission records its judgment on me as pastor of the Chapel Hill Church.

That this section is a comprehensive report to the Commission is indicated in the opening paragraph which reads:

“To some extent, the activities of the pastor have been covered within the foregoing report. *For a total picture*, however, some of these will be repeated.” (Italics mine)

The section entitled “THE PASTOR” is not over long and I would like to present it in full:

VI. THE PASTOR

To some extent, the activities of the Pastor have been covered within the foregoing report. For a total picture, however, some of these will be repeated.

The Pastor of this Church is deeply loved by the vast majority of the active officers and members. There are those who frankly consider him an embodiment of Jesus. Others feel close personal ties which they could describe best by saying that should something happen to them, they could think of no one they would prefer taking their children to rear, than Mr. Jones. There are those who have known the comfort of his presence in trouble or sickness; others who have had mental and spiritual problems solved under his pastoral ministry. People in trouble

have been taken into his home. People who have needed help have found it in him.

He has been a fearless champion of the ideal of the brotherhood of man. He has not been willing to draw a line beyond which he might feel the teachings of Jesus need not apply, nor has he been able, in good conscience, to compartmentalize the practical aspects of his religious life in such a way as to avoid meeting realistically issues that he felt in the name of religion, should be met. He has not been stayed, in his effort to present to his people a picture of practical religion at work, by criticism or threats. He presents a face to the world which is respected by a great many outside his immediate congregation. Many indicate that, in their opinion, he is the "finest Christian in the Community."

The Commission has not made an effort to hear Mr. Jones preach. By others however, his sermons have been variously described as the soul of the Church's spiritual life, as "seminars in religious experience," and as "challenges to individual thinking." In the opinion of some, Mr. Jones, as a preacher, is without peer in American Protestantism today. His sermons are earnest, simple discussions of practical problems, largely ethical in content. A great many of his hearers feel that he comes to grips with spiritual problems in their own experience and helps them find a way out. Certainly for those who look upon this as their Church home, the pulpit ministry occupies the central place of interest and importance.

As the Pastor enjoys the confidence and support of many, so too, he is the subject of much criticism. A great many who have not found, in their opinion, a Church home here, are also of the opinion that the reason lies in this Church's pastor. Some feel there is a lack of doctrinal content in his messages; others are not personally satisfied with the worship atmosphere generated in the Services. Some find the services in which the Sacrament is administered, spiritually barren; others believe that the Pastor does not preach a gospel in which the concept of "salvation" is sufficiently central. In short, criticisms of Mr. Jones' pulpit ministry are, generally speaking, theologically oriented.

Aware that a great deal of the interest in this Commission's work will center upon its report on the Pastor, the Commission has taken great care to secure an accurate evaluation of this Church's pastoral ministry. It has met privately in a lengthy session with Mr. Jones. It has taken into consideration the various shades of opinion expressed by others regarding his theological views. It has studied the life and the program of the Church, to the extent that they might indicate spiritual and practical attitudes and emphases on the part of the Pastor—realizing that the lives and activities of individuals and Church groups necessarily reflect, endorse, or corroborate to a great extent, that for which the Pastor stands. It has, finally, noted the fact that this Church

evidently has stood for essentially the same principles throughout a much longer period than that covered by Mr. Jones' pastorate.

The commission finds a central emphasis recurring within the thought of this Church's members, within the religious convictions of its officers and within the theological convictions of its Pastor. This emphasis is reflected, not so much in specific doctrinal or dogmatic affirmations or denials, as in an overall philosophy of religion. In short, the Commission has found that the crux of the matter, theologically speaking, is not the percentage of the Confession of Faith subscribed or rejected, but rather a controlling philosophy of religion. This philosophy might be variously expressed: that being a Christian is more important than being a Presbyterian; or that doctrinal radicalism is of less importance than whether or not individuals shall be free to worship God as they please; or that doctrines are affirmations that grow out of an individual's or a nation's religious experience; or that a man's experience of God is the material out of which he formulates his doctrines about God.

It should be said that the Commission found it difficult to ascertain the exact nature of Mr. Jones' theological convictions. Moreover, it has reached the conclusion that the details of belief are, in this instance, less significant than a general attitude and approach towards religion which has been clearly expressed within the context of Mr. Jones' remarks to the Commission and which repeatedly appeared in the opinions of the officers and members of the Church, as indicated above.

This philosophy of religion consists in the view that "religion" is in some sense prior to and independent of "dogma" or doctrine." Insofar as they are related, "religion" comes first, both from the standpoint of time and order. It is a philosophy that considers religious *feeling* more important, and in some sense the controlling principle, when compared with religious *truth*.

It has the practical effect of making doctrines appear to be the product of human efforts; of making religion something for man to work out for himself; of making God Someone to be sought out and found. In the final analysis, the emphasis falls upon *man* instead of upon God, and doctrines become what man thinks they ought to be instead of what they are, no matter what man thinks. It permits a Church to embrace every shade of theological opinion and forbids it to dictate in any way to the convictions of its members, for each has an equal right to be heard.

At first glance, this philosophy of religion looks pretty good. But it violates the essential point of view accepted by the entire Reformed tradition. It puts the cart before the horse. Those who follow it, in effect believe they can love God before they really know Him; trust Him before they have heard what He intends to do; treat Him familiarly before they have found out whether

it wouldn't be better to be afraid; seek Him before they know *why* He may be found; call upon Him without giving a thought to what brings Him near—in short, tell Him what they are prepared to believe about Him, instead of listening to hear what He may have to say. It weakens the essential concept of *dependence*.

This Commission feels that this attitude towards religion was, in general, expressed by the Pastor, exists within this Church—is, moreover, the key to an understanding of the Church. It accepts the view that the history of religion is not the history of man's search for God, but of the ways in which God has dealt with man. The Commission further believes that Biblical religion is not man's leap into the dim unknown, but what happens when God reaches down and touches man. The Christian life may be, in a sense, the consequence of religious experience, but religious feeling is itself a response to a *given*. Doctrines may sometimes be conditioned by religious experience, but essentially they are developed out of a prior *given*, of which they are expressions.

Presbyterianism affirms that religion has to do with what God has done and is doing as He discloses Himself to man. Because Christianity, therefore, deals with Revelation and not man's search for truth, religious doctrines—the Truth about God—are given, not found. They must precede religious experience. What God is; what man is; what God thinks of man; what He intends to do with man; what He has done for man; how He desires man to respond; what He expects man to believe; yes, even how He wants to be worshipped, all form a part of the *given*, they are not for man to decide—God is forever a mystery and an unknown to man until He breaks through the barrier between Time and Eternity. Man cannot do this.

Presbyterianism does not feel it has the right to pass judgment upon the Record of God's Revelation. Interpret it, analyze it, apply in terms of changing conditions, yes. But alter it, censor it, ridicule it, deny it, cast it aside in favor of other possible varieties of religious interpretation, no.

In conclusion, the Commission does not feel that the Pastor, the officers of this Church, or the members (to the extent they reflect their spiritual leaders) have always been true to the Record of God's Revelation as it is interpreted in our denominational Standards. We realize the seriousness of the charge, but it is simply a reflection of the seriousness with which we view the discrepancies in faith and polity that we have found.

Signed:

Z. T. Piephoff, Chairman

J. M. Garrison, G. D. Jackson, G. A. Taylor and J. C. Whitley,
Ministers.

E. F. Andrews, F. L. Knight, C. W. Perry, D. J. Walker and
M. E. Yount, Elders.

It is to be expected that a "Judicial" Commission will get as much firsthand information as possible. The Commission admits it made no effort to get firsthand information saying, "*The Commission has not made an effort to hear Mr. Jones preach.*" Ministers on the Commission could not be expected to make Sunday visits to Chapel Hill but half the Commission were laymen and they could have gotten firsthand information with ease.

One would expect a "Judicial" Commission to weigh evidence and give definite, accurate and clear-cut judgment. Instead this Commission seems to make statements that cancel one another out with no further statement of where the weight of evidence lies. For example, the Commission reports, "His sermons are earnest, simple discussions of practical problems, largely ethical in content." Then the immediately following sentence reads: "A great many of his hearers feel that he comes to grips with spiritual problems in their own experience and helps them find a way out."

Again the Report reads: "As the pastor enjoys the confidence and support of many, so too, he is the subject of much criticism. A great many who have not found, in their opinion, a Church home here, are also of the opinion the reason lies in this Church's Pastor . . ." The Commission never reveals the meaning of words like "a great many," "other" and "some" so that the reader never knows where the weight of evidence lies. Those of us familiar with the procedure of the investigation know the Commission spent more than two days with appointments at fifteen and thirty minute intervals (sometimes dividing into two groups and hearing two testimonies in each period), listening to favorable evidence voluntarily offered. There is a conviction (unsupported by evidence) that one of the reasons for the refusal to make adverse testimony available to us and others is the small amount of such testimony and the lack of competence of those who testified to know whereof they spoke.

A careful reading of this section of the Report indicates the chief concern of the Commission was with matters of theology. I quote:

"In short, the Commission has found that the crux of the matter, theologically speaking, is not the percentage of the Confession of Faith subscribed or rejected, but rather a controlling philosophy . . . variously expressed: *That being a Christian is more im-*

portant than being a Presbyterian: or that doctrinal radicalism is of less importance than whether or not individuals shall be free to worship God as they please: or that doctrines are affirmations that grow out of an individual's or a nation's experience: or that a man's experience of God is the material out of which he formulates his doctrines about God." (Italics mine)

A careful analysis of this paragraph uncovers several problems.

A.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DENOMINATIONALISM (PRESBYTERIANISM) AND THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT AS A WHOLE.

"This Church believes . . . it is more important to be Christian than to be a Presbyterian."

From the Report—Judicial Commission of Orange Presbytery

This statement implies it is more important to be Presbyterian than to be Christian.

I believe a Christian's prime loyalty is to God as we know Him through Jesus Christ and not to any institution as such. But insofar as a Christian has ties of loyalty to institutions, I believe his first loyalty is not to his denomination but to the Church Universal, the ongoing movement of followers of Jesus Christ. We are committed first and foremost to the Christian fellowship which originated in those few men and women who gave themselves to following Jesus, seeking continual guidance and inspiration from Him.

Denominations have arisen at various times in the history of the Christian movement when a truth needed a witness and a deed needed courageous doing. We date the actual beginning of the Presbyterian movement as we know it to the middle of the 17th Century when the Assembly of Westminster Divines bore witness by word and deed to the much needed truths of God that neither political nor ecclesiastical authorities can claim the sovereignty of man's mind, body and spirit, for only God is sovereign and man is free under God.

In like manner other denominations have arisen in crises of history when a truth of God needed emphasis and embodiment. So I do not conceive of the Presbyterian denomination as the

possessor of more Christian truth than other denominations. The fundamental truths of the Christian faith are held by most denominations. There is no distinctive Presbyterian doctrine—but Presbyterians have a distinctive historical emphasis. Indeed, the danger of denominationalism is that it may mistake its partial truth for the whole truth and its way and program as the best and only way and program.

Paul was expressing this truth when he tried to keep the early Christians conscious of their unity and spoke of the “body of Christ, with many members.” We are now coming to realize that denominationalism in its extreme form is a dis severing of the body of Christ.

It is more important to be Christian than Presbyterian, for denominations are means and not ends.

B.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REVELATION AND EXPERIENCE.

“This Church believes . . . a man’s experience of God is the material out of which he formulates his doctrine of God . . . doctrines are affirmations that grow out of an individual’s or a nation’s experience . . . religion is in some sense prior to and independent of ‘doctrine’ or ‘dogma.’”

From the Report: Judicial Commission of Orange Presbytery

Ministerial minds, theologically trained, will recognize we have raised the problem of relationship between Revelation (God’s way of making known) and experience (man’s way of learning).

I agree with the Commission that “religion has to do with what God has done and is doing as He discloses Himself to man,”—that “religious feeling is itself a response to a *given*.”

Indeed, as I see it, the only thing a man does in this life is respond to and use what God has placed here. It is true in the realm of the material, as every farmer or chemist knows. They both work with the “given,” the farmer with seed and soil; the chemist with the “given” elements in solid, liquid or gas form. Both can only receive and use them. What is thus true in these areas is true also in the realm of the moral and spiritual. Man does not create truth, beauty or goodness. They are as much a part of the “givenness” of this world as is soil, sun or rain.

The charge that I believe “religion . . . is prior to and indepen-

dent of dogma or doctrine" is true. Doctrine and dogma, as commonly understood, are men's statements of truth and teaching, and I am convinced truth preceded men's statements of it.

There is no difference between the Commission and me as far as belief in the *fact* of Revelation is concerned. The Scripture, "God in sundry times and divers manners has revealed Himself. . ." has my wholehearted assent.

There does appear to be some differences between the Commission and me in our answers to the question: How does Revelation take place? How does God make known His nature and will to man?

Since the writing of the Confession of Faith in the middle of the 17th Century man has learned much about the ways in which God acts in the universe, and our theory of *how* truth is revealed has undergone great change.

This change can be understood if we state briefly the idea of Revelation from a section of the Westminster Confession of Faith together with the advances made in this area of Christian thought in the last three centuries. The first chapter of the Confession of Faith, entitled "The Scriptures," begins as follows:

"Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God as to leave men inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare His will unto His church, and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth . . . to commit the same wholly unto writing . . ."

The theory was, in brief, that there is knowledge of God that man gains, with God's help, through reason, conscience and the study of nature. This "natural" knowledge is not sufficient to save man and there is needed a "super-natural" revelation concerning the truths of Christian faith. This is given in the Bible which is itself the Word of God and thereby the Revelation of God.

Their understanding of God and His relation to the world impelled them to describe the method of Revelation in two ways. First, God is known through the everyday observable "natural" phenomena. Second, God is known as He acts directly and in strictly other-than-this-world methods, by miraculous means (as the word is ordinarily used). The writers of the Confession of

Faith believed THE BIBLE to be the very words of God which had been "wholly committed unto writing." It, being the direct work of God, was perfect and infallible in every part.

It is no reflection on the framers of the Westminster Confession that many thoughtful and devout persons can no longer hold strictly to this view. In the last three centuries historical study of the Bible shows it is not a book whose words or ideas were directly and super-naturally given to man and infallibly recorded. The writings reflect historical situations and root in human experience, so much so that to neglect this fact makes for religious fanaticism and bigotry, and the truth of God goes unrealized. In addition to the historical study of the Scriptures the growth of a body of scientific knowledge has given us a better understanding of God's relationship to the world. The dualistic and mechanistic concept of God's relationship has become untenable for many in our generation. We cannot think of God acting directly, externally and wholly outside of man and his experience at some times; and indirectly, internally and inside man and his experience at other times. We no longer set human discovery and divine revelation over against one another.

The Bible itself shows the outgrowing of the conception of revelation by the external, mechanical and infallible action of God. In general, the Old Testament shows two levels of thought concerning God's way of speaking to man. There is a movement in this thought from a lower level to a higher.

In the early years and on the lower levels revelation appears as the action of God from without. It is sought in something extraordinary and unusual. Often it is in something physical as in the talking of Balaam's ass, a fleece dry when the ground is covered with dew, literal tables of rock written on by a divine finger. Even when the communication from God is in the realm of the spirit, it is found in a dream or state of ecstasy, and man is used, independent of his conscious and reasonable state.

In the later years and on the higher level revelation is still nothing less than God communicating. God is still high and lifted up and his ways are not man's ways. The advance comes in both the nature and method of God's revelation. God is not mere power demanding abject and unquestioning submission and sacrifices; God is righteousness, truth and mercy demanding the same of man.

Revelation, because it is a morally conditioned relationship, means reason speaking to reason, justice and righteousness speaking to conscience, forgiveness and mercy speaking to man's failure and evil. God, in this higher conception of revelation says, "Come, let us reason together"; "Son of man, stand on thy feet."

It is noteworthy that this revelation of God comes not independent of, but *in* and *through* the experiences of men. God reveals himself more clearly through moral experience and insight. The forgiving mercy that Hosea found in his own heart for an unfaithful wife; the indignation that Amos and Micah expressed over the national scandal of poverty and injustice were to them more than a mere expression of human ideals. They were God's spirit speaking to them of His judgment and His will.

The difference between this understanding of revelation and the other is in the fact there is no longer complete separation of natural and super-natural, ordinary and extra-ordinary. While God is still recognized as transcendent, there is no complete separation of that which is human from that which is divine. God is found in and through the experiences of man, and man finds God not in abject and fearful submission but in active response of heart, mind, soul and strength to God.

While the Revelation of God in the Old Testament is primarily in the area of ethics (righteousness) this also has meaning for the nature of God, for the character of God is clearly indicated by the character of His demands upon His creatures. When Micah says, "What does the Lord require of thee but to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly . . ." he is declaring not only the kind of life God expects of man but also the kind of God man is serving.

Now this concept of Revelation of God through the moral experiences and spiritual insights of human life is carried more fully into the New Testament. Here God is no autocratic and fearful power issuing decrees and throwing in a lightning bolt to scare men into accepting them. The Commission's statement that a man may not treat God familiarly before he has found out "whether it wouldn't be better to be afraid" is far from the God revealed by Jesus Christ. The New Testament writers were convinced that God was no mere voice speaking from above, no arm reaching down in fearful and arbitrary power; but God, in Jesus was Love entering into humanity. God's spirit dwelt in

man. Revelation of the nature of God, His love and His will was in and through a human life. The theologian speaks of this as the Doctrine of the Incarnation. That which they had seen, and heard, and handled in their own experience with Jesus of Nazareth the early Christians declared to be God's Revelation.

Theologians today think it more accurate to speak of Jesus as the Revelation of God than the Bible as the Revelation of God. It is instructive in constructing a theory of Revelation to go to the New Testament and note how in Jesus the divine truth and love were united in a human life in a fresh and unique unfolding of the nature and will of God.

Jesus insisted that His words of truth and deeds of love and mercy were wholly from God—"I do that which is pleasing in His sight." When He bears witness to the truth it is truth not of His creation or making but of God, the Father. Jesus is utterly dependent on God for both goodness and truth.

But it must be noted He does not find God in some occasional word from the heavens, or in some miraculous answer to prayer that saves Him from disaster and pain, or in some passing ecstatic state or feeling. Jesus finds the word of God within, speaking to him in His own insights, upholding Him in His own spirit of love and integrity. It was thus that God revealed himself. Jesus moved through life with a freedom and a quiet assurance, a strength that was His own, yet the gift of God. Before God, Jesus was humble and obedient and thus became the supreme revealer of God.

It is to be remembered that Paul was writing no theological treatise but stating in terms of his experience his conviction that the Eternal God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself; that the divine had joined itself to the human in such a way that God could be known in Jesus—not in writings, or religious rites and forms, but in Jesus, the man. God's revelation, for Paul, was not the Scriptures (as he knew them), nor an occasional word or extra-ordinary deed but an historic person. The transcendent God becomes known in a joining of divine truth with human life in human experience. Such is the meaning of the statement that Jesus was both God and man, human and divine.

We are now ready for the final concern of the Commission:

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FREEDOM OF

CHURCH AND MINISTER TO THINK AND TO ORDER ITS WORSHIP AND PROGRAM AND THE HISTORICAL STANDARDS OF THE CHURCH.

"The Commission does not feel that the pastor, the officers of this Church . . . have always been true to the Record of God's revelation as interpreted in our denominational standards."

"This Church believes doctrinal radicalism is of less importance than whether or not individuals shall be free to worship God as they please."

"The Presbyterian Church" (as a denomination) ". . . takes the position its faith and polity are more sacred than rules. We believe that Presbyterianism is taken from the Scriptures which are . . . the Word of God."

From: The Report—Judicial Commission of Orange Presbytery

The Commission views the Confession of Faith and the Book of Church Order as outlines of theology and statements of procedure and ritual that must be rigidly followed. The framers of these statements seemingly had no intention of binding the future by such rigid acceptance of either the Confession of Faith or the Book of Church Order, for they state:

"All Synods and Councils since Apostolic times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the *rule of faith or practise but to be used as a help in both.*" (Italics mine)

From Westminster Confession of Faith
Chapter XXXIII—Section XXIII

The Confession of Faith is valuable as a system of doctrine for its insights concerning sovereignty and freedom as regards God and man. These truths are expressed with such clarity and forcefulness that modern man may well receive them with gratitude.

The Twentieth Century Christian, however, must face in a more adequate way than the framers of the Confession have done (due in large part to the century in which it was written) an intellectual reinterpretation of the universe. The generations now studying and teaching in our universities feel this acutely. Freedom of the spiritual life of man requires that the Church refrain from limiting its thoughtful activity to the intellectual framework of the 17th Century.

Truth in every sphere accumulates, expands and enlarges with the increasing ability of man to utilize past insights and, by faith, to lay hold upon new ones. So what one is asked to believe in the

20th Century must not be circumscribed by views of the 17th Century any more than 20th Century medical practice should be asked to live by 17th Century standards. To be a genuine follower of Christ the Christian must be free to study the Scripture with all the intellectual tools modern research has given him, combine the truth of the past with insights of the present and thereby gain a rich Christian experience. The freedom Christ spoke of when he said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" must not be nullified by a Church that requires a man to say he believes what he cannot square with the facts of the universe or his innermost convictions.

This is not to say the Confession of Faith is a relic of the past, outgrown and useless to modern man. Every spiritual experience through which Christians have gone and every truth laid hold upon thereby will assist the teachable person toward a fullness of truth, righteousness and love. It is to say the sincere, seeking, thoughtful person must not be required to take over unchanged the world view or the intellectual statements of another day concerning the Christian life and experience.

The function of the Church is to be a revealing place of God "Whose thoughts are not our thoughts and Whose ways are not our ways." The Church ill serves its God or its time when its heart and mind are so continually bound to the past that it must take as its task the perpetuation of the creeds and the molding of thought to fit them. I accept the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Book of Church Order not as definitive, final and complete statements of Christian truth or practice into which I must fit my convictions and actions but as a notable, historical statement of Christian truth and practice, insight and inspiration for followers of Christ in every generation.

I agree with the Westminster Divines who authored our standards that "all Synods and Councils have erred and will continue to err and are therefore not to be made the rule of faith and practice but to be used as a help in both."

The nationwide interest in this controversy has been due to no especial merit or demerit in you and me. We are symbolic of a conflict in the heart, mind and spirit of our times. There are other ministers and laymen holding essentially the same conviction that I and the Chapel Hill officers have expressed. For their sakes, as well as for ours, it is regrettable that we were

never allowed an opportunity to face the problems raised by the Commission with a spirit of frankness, integrity, goodwill and reconciliation. It is even more regrettable that a spirit of secrecy should so surround the findings of the group that evidence must be hidden away from the light of truth. That, too, is symbolic of a struggle going on in our times.

This has been a difficult and painful year for us all. Controversy has a way of making emotional partisans out of ordinarily fair and companionable folk; of magnifying differences and minimizing agreements; of making matters of less importance loom large while matters of much importance appear small; of using thought and energy in destruction that could better be employed in construction.

I should like to close this statement on a higher level than that of controversy. I am asking you to divest me of my ministry in the Presbyterian Church of the United States with disappointment but without bitterness. Our differences are such that make me unacceptable to you denominationally, but in the larger Christian family I trust we shall remain brethren serving the same God in the spirit of Christ.

My future is uncertain but in some capacity, lay or ministerial, I shall continue to share with my fellows my imperfect and partial experience of the height, depth, and breadth of the love of God as seen in Jesus Christ. I shall try to grow inwardly in the grace and knowledge of Christ Jesus and to embody with as much sincerity and courage as God enables me to possess the spirit and teaching of Jesus in my own life and the life of society.

These things I believe we share together.





UNIVERSITY OF N.C. AT CHAPEL HILL



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